

## **Inspections services and inter-rater reliability: differential professional role identities of Dutch veterinarian inspectors**

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### **Abstract**

In the context of the ‘regulatory state’, regulatory authorities hold a central role in the interaction between government and other actors. Providing reliable judgments and ensuring equal treatment is a prerequisite for inspection services to preserve authority and gain legitimacy and trust. The question of inter-rater reliability is therefore very prominent within inspection services. According to identity theory, the perception of individual inspectors of their professional role can be decisive with regard to their work related judgements. This perception is therefore expected to be an important antecedent of inter-rater reliability. We combine theories on professionalism and identity theory to understand the potentially diverging ways inspectors perceive their professional role. We use the case of veterinarian-inspectors in the Dutch food safety services to identify different role identities existing in the occupational group of veterinarian-inspectors.

**Keywords: identity, role, professionalism, inspection services, food safety services**

## **1. Introduction**

In current society, the government is dependent on a diverse set of public, semi-public, and private actors for the delivery of public services as result of the switch from an active welfare state towards an ‘enabling state’ (Page & Wright, 2007). However, with this switch accountability and control have become basic, yet complex issues, influencing the way in which the ‘regulatory state’ is organized (Majone, 1994; Robben, 2010). In the ‘enabling state’, regulatory authorities are responsible for safeguarding and improving the quality of services in their domains, managing risks for society. Health care inspection services, for example, stand for public health by enforcing quality of health care services, prevention policies and medical products. Another example are the food safety services who monitor the food production chain in order to safeguard not only public health, but also animal health and animal welfare.

Regulatory authorities occupy a central role in the interaction between government and other actors in policy networks; one of their most important tasks being the enforcement of rules. As equality is a core value in the public sector (Rainey, 2003), specifically in regulation, inequality in the treatment of cases cannot be allowed. Therefore, providing reliable and valid judgments is a prerequisite for inspection services to preserve authority and gain legitimacy and trust from both inspectees and society at large (Tuijn e.a., 2011). This makes the problem of inter-rater reliability prominent within inspection services.

The problem inspection services are struggling with is the substantial amount of discretionary room and autonomy of inspectors, making it difficult to steer their decision making. As a result, the inspectors’ own professional judgement and perception of individual cases is decisive for their behaviour. As differences in individual perception and judgement

between professionals can result in unequal treatment of equal cases, it's no surprise that practitioners and public administration scholars are interested in explaining and steering perceptions of public service professionals; trying to attain inter-rater reliability specifically.

In order to overcome this problem inspection services try to influence the inspectors' perceptions through training programmes and suchlike. During this socialization process, inspection services try to communicate their expectations of the behaviour of inspectors and as such outline how the organization understands the inspectors' professional role. However, individuals can interpret these role expectations in different ways. They can adopt the same interpretation as the organization, diverge from it completely or diverge from it on certain aspects. In order to explain similarities and differences in perception of inspectors, it's important not only to study the individual inspectors, but also to focus on the perception of the organization with regard to the professional role of individual inspectors. This research deliberately does not focus on the link between perceptions and behaviour since the link between organizational and (different) individual perceptions are central.

Combining theory on professionalism and identity theory can lead to a better understanding of how individual inspectors show both differences and similarities in their task perception. This provides insights into the potentially diverging ways inspectors perceive their professional role, which is a first step in explaining their behaviour. First, we discuss the issue of professionalism and professional autonomy. Second, we present the concepts of role and (role) identity as discussed in identity theory, and relate these to the issue of professionals attaining an individual interpretation of their professional role. Next, we use the case of veterinarian-inspectors in the Dutch food safety services to identify different role identities existing in one occupational group.

## 2. Professional autonomy and professional judgment of individual cases

In the literature on professionalism a dominant line of research is labelled the sociology of professionalism. According to this line of research, a shared professional identity is developed by professionals through professional socialization (shared educational background, professional trainings, membership of professional associations a.s.). This shared identity entails intra-occupational norms that prescribe the behaviour of professionals (Evetts, 2003; Evetts 2006; Andersen and Serritzlew, 2009).

In this sociology of professionalism we find three different approaches with regard to the content of this shared professional identity. First, the *functionalist approach* assumes that professionals are altruistic aiming to work in the best interest of their clients (Parsons, 1951; Goode, 1969; Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2000). In contrast, the *post-functionalist approach* is based on the idea that distinct professions are collectively self-interested trying to maintain a monopoly in the market for their services (Andersen and Pedersen, 2010; Evetts, 2006). Finally, there is a more balanced approach: the *re-evaluation or reappraisal of professionalism as normative value system*. This approach originates from the idea that professionalism can have both positive and negative effects for clients, practitioners and the social system as a whole (Evetts, 2003; Evetts, 2006).

The concept of a shared professional identity itself explains similarities rather than potential differences in the perception that public service professionals hold, and therefore subsequently in their behavior. The existence of different approaches, however, indicates differences in assessment with regard to the content of the shared professional identity. In contrast with the sociology of professionalism that is addressing professionalism at the collective level, a (less extensive) number of scholars focus on professionalism at the individual level. Here, professionalism is viewed as the identification of the individual with a

certain occupation through membership of and active involvement in professional organizations (Perry, 1997; DeHart-Davis et al., 2006; Moynihan and Pandey, 2007).

The latter approach allows for differences between individuals in the level of identification with the profession and in its behavioural implications. However, the main focus is on the strength of professional identification rather than on the content of this identification, as little attention is paid to professionals potentially identifying with different aspects of the profession. While the concept of personal identification explains the probability that one will act according to professional standards as being dependent on the strength of identification, it does not provide insights in the specific aspects of a profession with which one identifies.

By adding insights about the specific interpretations individuals have of their profession, more knowledge could be created about the basis for similarities and differences in the judgment of inspectors of individual cases. To add this insight, we propose the use of identity theory. In identity theory a link is made between the expectations society holds of professionals, the individual perceptions of professionals themselves about their role, and the behaviour of professionals. According to identity theory, individuals interpret their role in their own personal way. Therefore, the role as described by the organization can diverge from the personal interpretation held by the individual inspectors. These individual interpretations in turn are expected to influence the behaviour of individuals.

### **3. Identity theory**

In identity theory, there are two main concepts: role and (role) identity. The concept of *role* refers to “*the cultural expectations tied to social positions in the social*

*structure that actors try to meet (Burke & Stets, 2009:39)*". These roles are the expectations we hold of individuals occupying specific social positions. For example, in our society, a judge is expected to show a high level of integrity; or a medical doctor is expected to have up-to-date knowledge about different treatments. However, judges or medical doctors hold individual interpretations of their role and what in practice this implies for their professional behavior. Role identity is therefore defined as "*the distinctive interpretations individuals bring to their roles (Burke & Stets, 2009:30)*". Differences in role identities are a result of differences in interpretation of (aspects of) the role by individual professionals. In identity theory, role identities in turn determine the behavior of individual professionals. Similarities and differences in behavior are thus explained by similarities and differences in role identities; in other words, by the interpretation individuals have of their own role as a professional.

Linking identity theory with insights from the literature on professionals, we add the concept of individual professional (role) identity to the concept of shared (professional) identity. As noted before, the sociology of professionalism focuses on a shared identity. The content of this shared identity is established through the socialization of intra-occupation norms, serving as guidelines for professional behavior. When they are interpreted similarly these intra-occupational norms thus help to explain the similarities in individuals' perception of their role. According to identity theory, however, individuals will bring distinctive interpretations to their role as a professional. Role perceptions diverge as individuals interpret their professional role in different ways. Professionals all have their own frame of reference influenced not only by professional socialization, but also by their personal background and suchlike. Dependent on this frame of reference, a wide range of attitudes of professionals towards their profession can be expected.

In the next section, the case of veterinarian inspectors in the Dutch food safety service is introduced. Data sources and the coding process are described, before we make the step of analyzing role expectations and role identities of veterinarian-inspectors.

#### **4. Case, Data collection and Method**

The Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA) is responsible for safeguarding the health of animals, plants, animal welfare, food and consumer product safety, and enforcing legislation (NVWA, 2012). The NVWA comprises three different departments of which the department of Veterinary & Import is our focus. The main task of this department is to audit those parts of the food production chain that involve life animals and to enforce the rules and regulations that aim at protecting public health, animal health and animal welfare; ranging from livestock transport to slaughterhouses.

The NVWA is the largest employer of veterinarians in the Netherlands; most of them are employed within the department of Veterinary & Import. The department is divided according to three different domains of surveillance (Import, Livestock, and Slaughterhouses) each domain consisting of different teams of 20 to 30 inspectors. Veterinarian inspectors can be employed in two different ways: as civil servants holding a permanent position or on a contract-base as self-employed veterinarians. The self-employed veterinarians usually have a private veterinarian practice next to their engagement for the food safety service.

In our research the units of analysis are the veterinarian inspectors themselves. The panel on which this research is based consists of 32 veterinarian inspectors both from the teams of livestock and slaughterhouses. The decision to focus on these two areas of surveillance is that in these domains the clash between the values of animal health, animal welfare, public health, and economic interest is expected to be most prominent. The panel

contains permanent employed veterinarians as well as contract-based veterinarians.

Furthermore, the veterinarian inspectors selected for the panel differentiate with regard to gender, tenure, and age. Since this research is part of a follow up study, we have a slight overrepresentation of individuals new to the organization, taking into account the potentially high drop out in this category (Weiss, 1994).

Different streams of literature emphasize the importance of using a differentiated set of data sources. Therefore, in addition to the interviews with veterinarian inspectors, interviews with three team leaders (two from the domain of Slaughterhouses and one from the domain of Livestock) and two key figures in the organization (a top manager and a quality management officer) were conducted. Furthermore, two important policy documents with regard to veterinarian inspectors (*reform of enforcement policy* and *modernization activities living animals and products*) and the research reports of the committee Vanthemsche were analyzed. The committee Vanthemsche was an influential committee auditing the performance of the Dutch Food Safety Services. Their assessment has led to major reforms in the organization. Finally, the vacancy text that is used for recruiting veterinarian inspectors was also taken into account.

In qualitative data analysis scientific rigor is determined by the coding process of the data (Boeije, 2010). Considerable attention has been paid to the procedure of coding for which MAXQDA is used as data analysis software. Our description of the ‘role of veterinarian inspectors’ started from the interviews with team leaders and key figures within the food safety organization. First, attention was paid to the different features the interviewees ascribed to the role of veterinarian inspectors. Next, those features mentioned by all interviewees were verified in the policy documents, research reports, and vacancy text. It appeared that features mentioned by team leaders and key figures were congruent with the description that could be deduced from the written documents. In other words, the description



of the role of veterinarian inspector as perceived by the organization is based on the common ideas deduced from the interviews with key figures and team leaders, the policy document, research reports and the vacancy text.

For determining role identities, the interviews with the veterinarian inspectors were used. The coding started from the organizational role description. The different dimensions that comprise the organizational role were taken as a starting point and the different ideas and interpretations of veterinarian inspectors on these dimensions were compared; showing the differences between the perceptions of veterinarian inspectors and their divergence from the organizational role. It should be noted that the excerpts used in this paper are chosen based on their illustrative purposes, trying to use excerpts from the different sources<sup>1</sup>.

The next section elaborates on the professional role of veterinarian inspector as described by The Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority. After that the interpretations of the dimensions by veterinarian inspectors are discussed.

## **5. The professional role of the veterinarian-inspector**

Earlier, role was referred to as social expectations about a certain profession or occupation. Different actors surrounding an individual all hold social expectations. In the case of veterinarian inspectors those actors for example include slaughterhouse employees or the faculty of veterinarian medicine. As our focus in this paper, however, is on the relation between expectations from the own organization (the organizational role) and the interpretation of the veterinarian inspectors (the individual role identity), we define the role from an organizational point of view solely.

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<sup>1</sup> The excerpts are translated from Dutch to English.

One aspect that is emphasized by the different organizational sources is the knowledge base of veterinarian inspectors. It is stated that veterinarian inspectors should have the know-how to perform the job, referring to both knowledge about veterinarian medicine and about enforcement. It is certainly important that veterinarian inspectors are capable of making the right diagnosis. However, they should also have extensive knowledge of enforcement tools to be decisive, and know who to contact in case of questions.

*[V]eterinarian inspectors need to get insight in the use of enforcement tools...veterinarian inspectors must have knowledge and understanding of instructions [Policy document: VWA modernisering, 2007]*

*[T]he Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority has made large investments in the education of their employees and practitioners...different courses have been developed in cooperation with the faculty of veterinarian medicine: law and regulations, several courses focusing on theory and practice of enforcement, and organizational knowledge and behavioral skills (like communication) [Research report: Vanthemsche, 2011]*

The values veterinarian inspectors should stand for in their work are also explicitly mentioned in the different data sources, namely: public health, animal health and animal welfare. It is important for ‘*the*’ veterinarian inspector to see the societal importance of safeguarding these values.

*[I]nspectors should be capable of seeing the bigger picture. They are not there to just check the chickens passing, but for the bigger picture. They are there for public health and animal welfare. [Manager 5]*

Regarding the relations between veterinarian inspectors themselves, the importance of an open culture is stressed. The veterinarian inspectors should be able to discuss things without judging and should be team players. It is equally important that they learn from each other since this (could) increase(s) uniformity in enforcement behavior. Uniformity and consistency of enforcement are major issues as emphasized in both interviews (with team leaders and key figures) and policy documents.

*[V]eterinarian inspectors need to be uniform and effective [Policy document: VWA modernisering, 2007]*

*[I]t (team meetings) allows for coming to agreements about daily practices [Research report: Vanthemsche, 2011]*

*[H]e (the veterinarian inspector) should be a team player. We select people who are capable of working on their own. By a team player I mean someone who is willing to share his knowledge and is prepared to help his colleagues if they run into something [Manager 3]*

A competency related both to the topic of open culture (internal) and enforcement (external) is communication. From the different sources, it appears that great importance is given to communication and interaction skills of veterinarian inspectors. They should not only be able and willing to discuss situations and learn from each other, veterinarian inspectors should also have the ability to get a (bad) message across. Veterinarian inspectors should be able to substantiate their decisions. It is important that they are getting companies to cooperate and are able to solve tense situations peacefully. This also makes assertiveness a prerequisite.

*[V]eterinarian inspectors should be able to work transparent [Policy document: VWA modernising, 2007]*

*[I]n the recruitment process people are selected who are capable of getting a bad message across, who are capable to stick to their decision and can phrase it correctly [Manager 3]*

*[Y]ou dispose of excellent written and oral communication skills [vacancy text veterinarian inspector]*

By all sources analyzed, the enforcement of rules is seen as the most prominent feature of a veterinarian inspector. The veterinarian inspectors themselves endorse to the viewpoint that enforcement is an important part of their role. Team leaders and key figures emphasize that veterinarian inspectors are first of all inspectors and their primary role is not that of service providers as sometimes is assumed by external parties. In the inspection process, veterinarian inspectors should detect and report abuses. The recruitment process for new employees has been geared to this enforcement competency.

*[T]he focus is on attracting people with abilities on the areas of teamwork and rule enforcement [Manager 2]*

As noted, the attitude towards enforcement is stressed by different data sources. These state that veterinarian inspectors should not only signal abuses, but also report these and act upon them. This enforcement should be proportionally. Importance is attached to the fact that inspectees should recognize and admit their misbehavior and have time to correct their

mistakes. However, if no improvement is made, actions should be taken. Therefore, veterinarian inspectors should be familiar with the available enforcement tools.

*[The] rule enforcement policy of the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority should be stern if necessary and soft if possible [Policy document: Handhaven met Verstand en Gevoel, 2005]*

*[V]eterinarian inspectors should be decisive and professional [Policy document: VWA modernisering, 2007]*

*[Y]ou (as a veterinarian inspector) should be able and willing to enforce the law...you must also be willing to be persistent (to sanction companies) [Manager 4]*

As to enforcement, the importance of detachment from the object of inspection is stressed. Veterinarian inspectors should not be emotionally involved with inspected companies. It is the company that is responsible for the product, while the veterinarian inspectors are responsible for the supervision. Therefore, veterinarian inspectors should not advice organizations. This detachment is also important with regard to reporting abuses, as it is expected to be easier to deal with hostility among inspectées when you are not attached to them.

*[V]eterinarian inspectors need to be flexible and honest [VWA modernisering, 2007]*

*[Y]ou have these service-oriented (veterinarian inspectors) that say we should be careful not to slow down the trade. Well that is too bad, but that's not our job. I mean, we should not*

*hinder trade unnecessarily, but stimulating trade is not our priority. Our top priorities are animal health, animal welfare, and food safety [Manager3]*

*[A] good inspector should be able to keep distance from the company and don't let the companies affect them [Manager 5]*

Summing up the role expectations of the veterinarian inspector as outlined by the organization: a veterinarian inspector is someone with know-how of both veterinarian medicine and enforcement. He stands for the values of public health, animal health, and animal welfare. The veterinarian inspector should be willing to discuss situations with and learn from colleagues, and related to this should possess good communication skills. Finally, a veterinarian inspector should keep a certain distance to the inspectée and be willing to enforce rules.

## **6. Professional role identities of veterinarian-inspectors.**

Role identities show us the perceptions and attitudes of veterinarian inspectors towards their work. As can be deduced from the interviews, each veterinarian inspector has his or her own unique combination of attitudes and perceptions.<sup>2</sup> As emerged from the organizational description of the role; there are several important features to a veterinarian inspector: knowledge base, values that should be safeguarded, open culture, communication, enforcement of rules, and the importance of detachment from the inspectée. In this section the different attitudes and perceptions of veterinarian inspectors are discussed.

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<sup>2</sup> Obviously, there is the possibility of perceptions changing over time. Important events in one's life or work can lead an individual to reconsider his or her attitudes and perceptions. This process will be addressed in our follow up study.

### *Knowledge base*

The organizational sources stress the need of an extensive knowledge base, both with regard to the veterinarian part of their job as to the inspection part. When asked about what they considered important features or competencies of a veterinarian inspector, 16 inspectors mentioned having know-how. It should be noted that the semi-structured nature of the interviews could cause this and that it cannot be stated that the other sixteen inspectors do not find knowledge important. Although some veterinarians stay vague about what they consider to be know-how; most are more specific and refer to knowledge of veterinarian medicine, the knowledge of inspection tools or both of the knowledge bases. However, it seems that most of these veterinarians perceive knowledge as the knowledge of inspection tools; this could be because they already have knowledge of veterinarian medicine since this is part of their training as veterinarian. However, they lack knowledge about inspection tools which is an aspect of the inspector part of their job.

*[Of] course, you need knowledge of legislation, to be able to say: 'look it is written down there, you really need to adhere to it [interviewee 17]*

*[Y]ou need to have knowledge about veterinarian medicine [interviewee 5]*

### *Communication*

The Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety authority also emphasizes the need for her veterinarian inspectors to be communicative towards both colleagues and inspectées. The majority of inspectors (26) also consider this to be an important competency for a veterinarian inspector. If inspectors mention communication skills, they usually refer to communication in situations where they have to enforce the law or have to get inspectées to comply. However,

there are also inspectors that stress the importance of communication with colleagues and always mention it in combination with communication towards inspectées. In some cases, the object is not really defined and inspectors emphasize the importance of just being able to deal with people in an acceptable way.

### *Values*

The Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority safeguards the values of public health, animal health, and animal welfare. In their job, veterinarian inspectors are at times confronted with a conflict between these values which in turn can also clash with the economic interest of the inspectées. Interestingly enough, supporting the farmer is one of the core values learned during veterinarian medicine. Therefore, situations occur in which the values from the organization can conflict with the values from the professional (veterinarian) background of the inspector. However, there is also some overlap between the different values as both the Dutch food safety services and veterinarian medicine consider animal health and animal welfare to be important.

The values of public health, animal health, and animal welfare are most often mentioned by veterinarian inspectors when asked what they considered important values in their work. However, there are variations in the importance inspectors attach to these values. In some interviews the values were not mentioned at all (this could also be due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews). With regard to the hierarchy veterinarian inspectors attach to these values, it is interesting to note that most inspectors mention public health and animal welfare in one sentence. Strangely enough, animal health is not often stressed. This could be explained by the fact that animal welfare is perceived as the ‘interest of the animal’, therefore it seems likely that animal welfare also includes animal health in the perception of some veterinarian inspectors.



*[A] well, take care that animal welfare is not (violated). Animal disease control. And besides that public health [interviewee 39]*

*[I] will put public health in the first place, after that animal health, animal welfare, both on the second place because they are related [interviewee 18]*

Veterinarian inspectors often hold a hierarchy with respect to the values they safeguard: some veterinarian inspectors explicitly put public health at the top of their list; other veterinarian inspectors prioritize animal welfare over public health, while there are also veterinarian inspectors only stressing animal welfare (and animal health) as the interest that should be safeguarded. Interestingly, the reversed situation is not the case, there are no veterinarian inspectors mentioning only public health as an interest.

*[Y]es, interests of animals. Stand for animal welfare [interviewee 36]*

*[W]e safeguard the welfare of animals. We will take care that it (slaughtering) happens in a humane manner [interviewee 22]*

Furthermore, safeguarding the economic interest of the inspectées is not explicitly discussed in the interviews. Only one interviewee explicitly mentions that the interests of the clients, slaughterhouses and farmers should also be taken into account because of their competitive position in Dutch Economy. However, this does not mean that the other inspectors don't find it important at all. Social desirability can also be a reason for inspectors not to mention economic interest explicitly as their actions are driven by it, especially as we find that when

interviewees describe situations where they have encountered problems, the economic interest is found to play an important role in decision making.

### *Open culture and learning environment*

An important part of the organizational role description is that veterinarian inspectors should be able to discuss issues with colleagues openly and should be team players. The Dutch food safety services find it important that a learning environment is created, since this could help increase the uniformity in enforcement. In turn, uniformity and consistency of enforcement are expected to strengthen the legitimacy of the inspection.

The individual inspectors hold conflicting views with regard to the learning climate in the organization. Some inspectors experience a culture in which mistakes are punished and individual initiatives are discouraged; which is conflicting with the idea of a learning climate; while others are more positive hereof. However this also seems to depend on the team in which inspectors work. It also seems that more recent employed individuals experience the ability to discuss issues at hand with colleagues, more specifically among each other, than do inspectors that have been employed in the organization for a longer period.

There also seems to be a difference in the perception of veterinarian inspectors with regard to the number of possibilities there are to discuss issues with colleagues. Especially, employees that are recently employed seem to find the number of possibilities to discuss issues with colleagues rather limited. This could be the result of the need to reduce the uncertainty during their socialization.

There are inspectors who actively try to discuss issues with colleagues and reach uniformity as they perceive this as important. It should be noted that this usually is based on personal initiatives. However, from the data it appears that there is a difference in both enforcement behavior and perception which seems to hinder the process of discussing issues at

hand with colleagues. Differences in enforcement behavior, in part, are linked to differences between the newer recruits who follow an extensive intra-organizational training program and the employees who have been recruited to the food safety services longer ago and at the time of entering the organization did not receive such training. There also seem to be few interactions between these two groups. Only one inspector mentioned an argument he has had with a colleague about enforcement. Furthermore, some veterinarian inspectors seem to accept the individualist disposition of veterinarian inspectors as given and assuming it originates from the professional training and experience they received as veterinarian; even if it is hindering uniformity in enforcement

#### *Distance towards inspectées*

From the role description analyzed earlier, it emerges that inspectors are there to inspect the inspectées and not to provide them with advice. This is conflicting with the idea that a veterinarian should support the farmers if they come up against problems. This ambivalence is represented in the different attitudes veterinarian inspectors have regarding their inspectées. It should be noted that the dynamics between inspector and inspectée are slightly different than in a normal client-supplier relation. Farmers and slaughterhouses pay The Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority for their (inspection) services. However, it does not necessarily mean they are getting the certificates they need for running their business as would be the case in a normal client-supplier relation. This puts constant strain on the relation between veterinarian inspector and inspectées.

The interviews show a wide range of attitudes of veterinarian inspectors towards inspectées. Displaying these attitudes as a continuum, we see at the one end veterinarian inspectors with high understanding attitudes towards inspected companies. Their perception is that these companies have good intentions, but are just not always able to live up to them. In

other words, high compassion and understanding for the companies is shown. At the other end of the continuum, veterinarian inspectors hold a negative attitude towards inspectées. This group of veterinarian inspectors has a distrusting attitude towards inspectées, trying to keep as much distance as possible from the inspectée.

*[F]rom a transporter you cannot expect knowledge about veterinarian medicine, knowledge about suffering like you have as a veterinarian [interviewee 39]*

*[I] am a farmer's son. I have lived my whole life on the countryside. Yes if you have ten farmers lined up, than eight of them are just doing well, but the other two are just doing it for money [Interviewee 31]*

*[W]e keep distrusting them. That is our mind-set [interviewee 7]*

This tension between being close to the inspectée versus keeping distance is an important dilemma identified in inspection work (Robben, 2010). A certain amount of closeness is necessary, since to great a distance can result in loss of information. However, being to close to the inspectée entails the risk of being influenced by the interest of the inspectée also known as capture. This implies that inspectors are constantly balancing on the edge, trying not to drop.

### *Enforcement of rules*

Enforcement of rules and regulations is one of the core tasks of veterinarian inspectors. The data show a wide divergence in perceptions with regard to enforcement and outline different explanations for this divergence. It emerges from the interviews that, to a certain extent, all

veterinarian inspectors have difficulty with enforcement. This is mainly due to the consequences of enforcement for the atmosphere on the work floor.

First, there is the reaction of slaughterhouse employees and farmers to the enforcement. In general, the culture in these companies is masculine; therefore, reactions to negative decisions can be hostile and sometimes even aggressive. Since inspectors go to these locations several times a week or are there on a permanent basis, it is considered important to keep on speaking terms with the inspectée.

*[Y]ou look as a person .....to not get into too much trouble ...you are looking for some way out since you have to go there tomorrow, and next week, and next month also [interviewee 5]*

For some veterinarian inspectors, the destruction of healthy animals is a factor that makes enforcement difficult. This is especially the case when destruction is due to bureaucratic regulation. However, it is shown that different perceptions lay behind this. Some veterinarian inspectors perceive it as waste of the animals since they were not bred to be destructed. Others perceive destruction of healthy animals as a waste of good meat. Difference with the former perception is that waste is perceived as a consumer (food) problem, rather than an animal welfare issue. Next to this, there are inspectors who perceive destruction mainly as a loss of income for the farmers and slaughterhouses.

*[T]he only thing I have real difficulty with is to shoot or throw away animals for no good reasons. It is a waste. First, with regard to the animal. Second, with respect to the meat [interviewee 3]*

*[I]t's different when you are a farmer yourself. Then you know that you don't want this to happen...That a whole truck of your pigs is destroyed...because every penny counts*  
*[interviewee 40]*

These experienced difficulties do not automatically lead to adopting a negative attitude towards enforcement. There are two main reasons for adopting a positive attitude towards enforcement. First, rules are perceived as legitimate and useful and the inspector is convinced that strict enforcement of these rules is the only way to safeguard the values of public health, animal health, and animal welfare.

*[I] try to find the logic in it (rules). Usually there is a reason why it is a law. There is always something on which it is based [interviewee 25]*

Second, a positive attitude is also adopted as inspectors perceive following the rules as socially desirable.

*[Y]ou know, someone made these rules behind a desk, but he doesn't work in a slaughterhouse...that are things that I find difficult, but you just do it [interviewee 8]*

At the other end of the spectrum, the reasons for adopting a negative attitude towards strict enforcement are twofold. First, there is a group of veterinarian inspectors that do not believe strict enforcement is the way to safeguard the values of public health, animal, health, and animal welfare.

*[W]ith friendliness you can stimulate individuals to perform the actions necessary*  
*[interviewee 39]*

Second, some veterinarian inspectors have difficulty with strict enforcement for personal reasons. These inspectors do not feel comfortable enforcing regulations in a strict manner; therefore, this group focuses more on getting inspectées to comply through dialogue.

*[Y]ou become more and more an enforcer, and that's not who I'm. I like to work along and don't want to say what is right and wrong [interviewee 33]*

*[O]nly enforcement is not my strength, and it won't ever be. I'm someone who wants to please people and per definition you don't please anyone here. Everyone dislikes you and that is sometimes difficult [interviewee 10]*

These differences seem in line with what in the literature is indicated as the difference between an enforcement style focused on compliance or on deterrence (Robben, 2010; Mertens, 2011). Compliance and deterrence should both be seen as two extremes on the continuum of how inspectors enforce the rules. If one chooses an enforcement style based on compliance than the inspector tries to gain cooperation from the inspectée. In contrast, an enforcement style based on deterrence focuses on the repression of undesirable behavior. As appears from the data this choice seems to be influenced by personal preferences.

To summarize, the Dutch food safety services has a clear profile of how veterinarian inspectors should be and act with regard to their knowledge base, communication, interaction with colleagues, the values they should safeguard, attitude towards enforcement, and their attitude towards inspectées. In the figure below, the six dimensions and the ideal typical

inspector (according to the Dutch food safety services) are presented. The rhombs show the score of an ideal typical veterinarian-inspector on each continuum. As appears from the analysis above, individual inspectors vary on each continuum depending on their role identity.

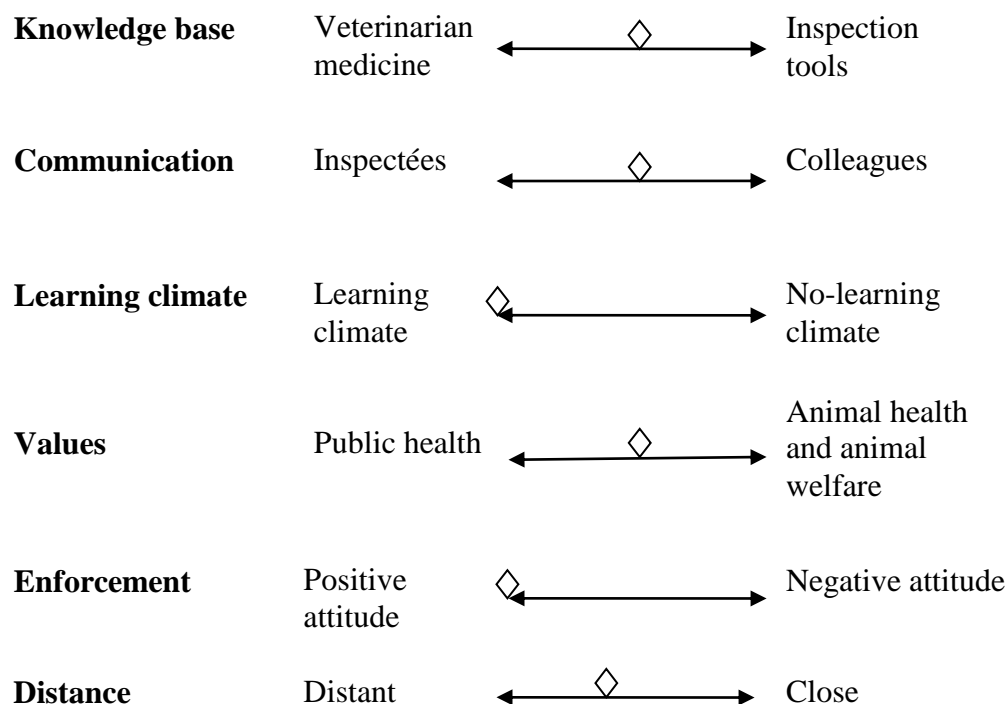


Figure 1 *organizational defined role*

## 7. Discussion and conclusion

Understanding differences in behavior of public service professionals is important with respect to equal treatment of citizens. In regulatory agencies, providing reliable judgments and ensuring equal treatment is seen as a prerequisite to preserve authority and gain legitimacy and trust in society. As a result, inspection services are focused on attaining inter-rater reliability among inspectors. Crucial for understanding behavior of the inspectors, in



turn, are the perceptions these professionals have of their job. The focus of this paper has been on (organizational) role and role identities of inspectors, more specifically the expectations the Dutch food safety service organization holds of its veterinarian inspectors and the different perceptions veterinarian inspectors in turn hold regarding their job.

In our case study, we found that the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority expects from their veterinarian inspectors to be knowledgeable about veterinarian medicine and enforcement; veterinarian inspectors should stand for the values of public health, animal health, and animal welfare. Veterinarian inspectors should also be capable of discussing situations, learn from colleagues, and communicate effectively. At the same time, and not unimportantly, inspectors are expected to keep their distance from inspectées and enforce rules.

The data shows that, in line with the organizations' expectations, the majority of individual veterinarian inspectors themselves also find know-how and good communication skills essential. Their focus is on knowledge about inspection tools. This could be explained by interviewées taking knowledge about veterinarian medicine more for granted since they are all veterinarians that learn about veterinarian medicine prior to entering the job, while they still have to learn about inspection tools after entering their job in the food safety services. Regarding communication, the inspectors' focus is on the communication with inspectées and less on the interaction with colleagues. This could also be explained by the nature of the profession. Veterinarian inspectors usually operate on their own; mostly in locations with no other colleagues and interacting with inspectées. Furthermore, these are usually situation in which they have to enforce the law with negative economic consequences for the inspectée. Getting their message across in an appropriate way therefore asks for excellent communication skills.

Divergence is found in the values that veterinarian inspectors state to stand for. Some inspectors say to safeguard public health, animal health, and animal welfare as is also stated in the organizational role description of a veterinarian inspector. However, other veterinarian inspectors proclaim to stand for animal health and animal welfare, and put less stress on public health, which is more in line with their identity as veterinarian. We see a difference in attitude towards inspectées: some inspectors are trusting, positive and more focused on helping inspectées, while others are more distrusting and keep more distance from inspectées. The attitudes of individual inspectors towards enforcement run from a positive attitude towards strict enforcement to a much more negative stance. This divergence seems to cause tension between colleagues, possibly hindering communication between colleagues. We find differences in the way veterinarian inspectors perceive the culture of the organization. Some feel they are able to openly discuss issues with colleagues, while others express that they don't feel comfortable discussing difficult situations because they expect negative reactions when they have made mistakes.

Developing categorizations of veterinarian inspectors based on their perceptions allows us to get a better understanding of veterinarian inspectors as an occupational group. While every veterinarian inspector scores differently on the different dimensions, there seems to be some relation between the dimensions. We do not find much variation among veterinarian inspectors on the dimensions of communication and knowledge. However, on the dimension of enforcement and the attitude towards inspectée, the data show that veterinarian inspectors affiliating more with a strict attitude towards enforcement are also keeping a distance between them and the inspectée; making sure they don't get too much involved. The dimension of values shows a more mixed picture, although there seems to be a trend that inspectors who are driven by the motivation of safeguarding animal health and public health

seem to adopt more positive attitudes towards strict enforcement than inspectors who are more extrinsically motivated ( working hours,money a.s.).

These relations between the scores of individual veterinarian inspectors on the different dimensions imply that although role identities for each individual are different, some general logics are influencing the role interpretations of veterinarian inspectors. These logics could be generated by the different (professional) role bases that construct the profession of veterinarian inspector has: the veterinarian base and the inspector base. Further research is needed to look at how these different professional bases interact and how this influences the role identity and behavior of veterinarian inspectors.

In conclusion, our study of veterinarian inspectors in Dutch food safety services show that, even when the organization has clear expectations regarding their inspectors, the inspectors' identities vary depending on the interpretations they bring to this professional role. In our study, fusing insights from identity theory into the study of professionals working in public services has proved to be valuable. Through combining these fields of research, we were able to detect and explain different perceptions of veterinarian inspectors vis-à-vis their task. This provides a first step in increasing our understanding of the topical issue of attaining inter-rater reliability in regulatory services. Indeed, in identity theory not only are role identities explained as resulting from differences in interpretation of (aspects of) the role by individual professionals; role identities in turn are assumed to determine the behavior of individual professionals. Therefore future research should focus on the impact of these diverging perceptions on the decision making of inspectors; this would be especially interesting in case of dilemmas caused by conflicting values and interests.

This research also contributes to the improvement of measurement of identities. Research in this field has been mainly quantitative. Recently, authors addressed the fact that the measurement instrument used are not sufficient enough and are in need of improvement

(Stets & Burke, 2009). These authors interpret improvement as using different kinds of quantitative methods such as measuring response latency. However, this research has studied identity theory in a qualitative way. Thereby providing more insight into the different ways veterinarian inspectors interpret their job. In order to be able to improve measurements instruments for identities such an in-depth knowledge is needed; making the measurement instruments more context-related.

In this paper, we found that training and job experience impacts on professional identities, as illustrated in the diverging perceptions of newly recruited inspectors who receive an intensive on-the-job-training versus inspectors who have worked in the organization for a longer time and have been recruited before this newcomer training was provided. Future research therefore should focus on gaining more in depth understanding of what explains the divergence in role interpretations and what causes perceptions or identities to change over time. Studying organizational and professional socialization processes, using identity theory, is expected to provide more insight into changes in role identities, differential aspects of the organizational role expectation that individuals identify with, and the extent to which professionals become insiders in the organization.

For the praxis, this new approach implies that for the management of an organization, having a clear view of the (expectations regarding the) role of their professionals is but one step. Next, attention should be paid to how relevant role expectations are communicated by the organization in general, but also by relevant actors in the organization such as heads of teams, or colleagues. Since professionals develop an individual interpretation of their role, organizations should make sure to discuss these role expectations with their employees, for example by discussing situations in which an at first sight straightforward expectation, such as strict enforcement by inspectors in practice, in practice proves much more difficult to attain.

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